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ABSTRACT

In August 1984, Northern Nevada Community College (NNCC) began a project to develop a practical plan for a program in personal literacy to be incorporated into its Adult Basic Education Program. The first months of the project were spent in structuring the test model, developing intake procedures, research, interagency networking, and coordinating a course approach. In January 1985, NNCC first offered "Becoming and Growing," a 60-hour course designed to address the failure syndrome and resulting lack of self-esteem; modify students' maladaptive behaviors; and help adults cope with stress, develop self-help strategies and survival skills, and meet educational goals. Of the 31 students in NNCC's Adult Learning Center, 12 signed up for the course, which included a counseling component and sessions on self-assessment, job search and preparation techniques, values clarification, time and stress management, relaxation, study skills, career and life planning, and computer literacy. Class sessions were taught by NNCC faculty and personnel from several community service organizations. With the exception of three students who dropped out at the beginning of the program, all students completed the course and continued to pursue their educational goals. (LAL)

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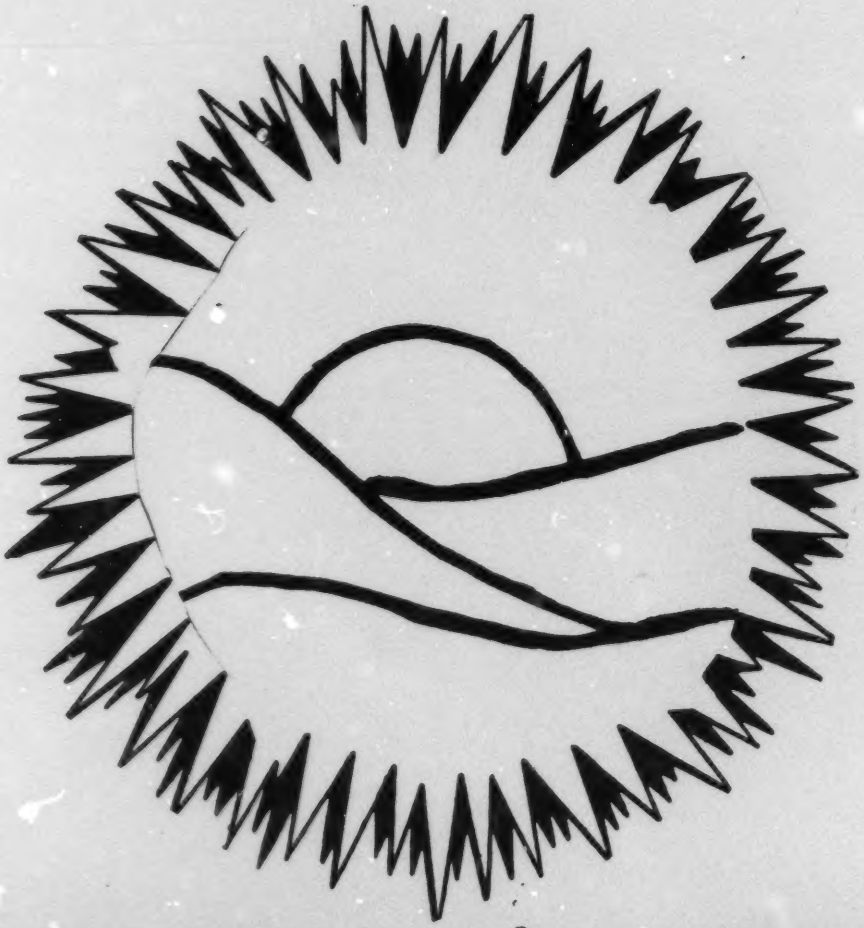
FINAL REPORT

SPECIAL PROJECT PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

PROJECT TOMORROW

NORTHERN NEVADA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

AUGUST 1, 1984 - July 31, 1985



JC 850 433

FINAL REPORT

PROJECT TOMORROW

N A R R A T I V E

In August 1984, Northern Nevada Community College began implementation of a special demonstration project designed to develop a practical plan for a program in personal literacy which would be incorporated into our Adult Basic Education program.

Diane Burger was hired as Coordinator for Project Tomorrow. Preliminary research into the needs of adult learners, barriers to them meeting their goals, and retention in Adult Education programs across the country was begun. The program was designed for socially deprived individuals striving to improve the quality of their education and their lives. We structured a class for high school, or college, credit which would enrich ABE students with the traditional self-help strategies usually available to the upper and middle classes. We utilized a coordinated interagency team of professionals, expanding the traditional skills competencies curriculum to include enrichment of the whole person. Tutors were hired and trained in supportive tutoring techniques, empathy, and active listening.

The next several months were spent in structuring the test model, developing intake procedures, research, agency networking, and coordinating a course approach with NNCC faculty, the Adult High School Diploma program and community service agencies. We began a bulletin board in the Adult Learning Center where we posted community educational activities and Adult Learning Center news.

In January 1985, "Growing and Becoming" (CAPS 122) was offered for high school or college credit. This was a 60-hour course designed to help the adult learner cope with the many stresses in his life and develop his own survival skills, thus helping him complete his own educational goals. The class met Monday and Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

We publicized the course through the newspaper, the NNCC tabloid, the social service agencies and within the programs in the Adult Learning Center. It was offered free to persons enrolled in the GED or High School Diploma program; college students paid regular tuition.

ENROLLMENT

There were 31 students enrolled in the Adult Learning Center in January 1985; twelve students signed up to take the class. Several others expressed an interest and needed the one-half elective credit, but were unable to find 60 hours of "class" time due to the many other obligations in their lives. "Growing and Becoming" began with twelve students from the Adult Learning Center attending. Enrollment was comprised of two college students, two widows, two housewives, three displaced homemakers, and three young males. All students were Caucasian except for one Native American and one Spanish-American. Age breakdown of students enrolled was as follows:

	Males	Females
16 - 24	3	2
25 - 44	1	1
45 - 59		3
60 and older		2

Of the three men age 18-24, each attended several classes and two were never seen again, either in "Growing and Becoming", or in the adult education program. By June, one was still working sporadically in the High School Diploma program. Follow-up on the other two showed that they were both unemployed, looking for work, and had recently moved out of their parents' homes. The third had a nightime job and was "too tired" to get up in the morning. He also said he really enjoyed "partying and getting into trouble." It would appear to be a fairly safe assumption, in general, that young "drop-out" men are not strongly

committed to furthering their education and do not have determined life goals, and that the attrition rate in their group will continue to be high. "Self-help" type programs were definitely not acceptable activities for them.

CURRICULUM

All students participating in the test model were tested using the COPES/CAPS/COPS series. All enjoyed taking the tests and learning about themselves.

Interagency cooperation was outstanding, both in sharing of information and leading class sessions. Agency personnel have been extremely generous and reliable. Nevada Employment Security Department personnel consulted with the Program Coordinator sharing ideas, statistics and information; they conducted workshops on "Self-Assessment," "Job Search Techniques," "Job Preparation," "Interviews," "Resumés," and "Importance of People Skills." The Job Opportunities in Nevada (JOIN) personnel cooperated with the above classes and also conducted one on "Building Self-Esteem." A team of professionals from the Elko County Mental Health Association provided instruction on "Time Management," "Rational and Critical Thinking," "Values Clarification," "Decision Making and Problem Solving," "Relaxation," Stress Management," "Self-Esteem," "Learned Helplessness and Blockages to Learning," "Assertion," "Building Self-Esteem," "Surviving Life's Crises," and "Communication."

NNCC faculty, John Pryor, Pat Warren, Sharron Racine, Sarah Campsey and Diane Burger, conducted classes on "Unlocking the Human Inside," "Financial Planning," "Study Skills and Learning Strategies," "You Are a Different Person Today," "Career and Life Planning," and "Fully Human - Fully Alive," which dealt with Right-Brain, Left-Brain thinking.

Computer literacy, under the supervision of the NNCC Computer Department faculty, was also a component of the course.

All students who entered the class were videotaped during a simulated personal interview. Each did self- and peer evaluations after watching the tapes, and they repeated the same interview format at the end of the term. They evaluated themselves and others, and compared their own growth during the semester. All felt positive about their own growth in confidence and self-esteem and the changes in themselves they could see by comparing the tapes. All participants maintained excellent attendance and enthusiasm throughout the semester.

COUNSELING COMPONENT

The role of "counselor" was incorporated into the job of the Project Coordinator. It seemed that the role of the counselor - a person who knew the participants, their problems, cared about them as individuals, and respected them as striving human beings, was pivotal for the success of the program. With the constant changing of class instructors each session, students were able to experience a variety of expertise and style which was stimulating, but the constant in the program depended on the coordinator and her "place" in their learning. Students often dropped by her office with new clippings on self-esteem or related class topics, happy news, or just for encouragement in a "down" time.

All students enrolled were required to participate in a one-hour counseling session with the Project Coordinator in the first weeks of class. We developed a standard interview format (attached) in which we explored the individual needs of each student, specific stresses and barriers in their lives, and non-directive goal setting. All students enrolled in the Adult Learning Center specified that they needed "someone to talk to" ;

most felt they go through life caring for others, while they were alone and had a lack of support. Our relationships became increasingly trusting and through the counselor relationship, we have been able to help ease some of the frustrations in their lives.

CELEBRATION

We held a graduation ceremony in May for all students in the GED or High School Diploma programs who attained their goals. There had been no such celebration or recognition in our Adult Learning Center for some years. All students who completed the "Growing and Becoming" course received a special certificate. Graduates' pictures were publicized in the local newspapers. Families and friends were present, flash bulbs were popping, and the feeling of a very special occasion for very special people was prevalent. A warmth developed in our program - students had a "supportive and friendly" atmosphere for learning. There was a special rapport among students enrolled in "Growing and Becoming".

TARGET AREAS

Our initial proposal targeted many variables in the life of an ABE student that compete with adult education, including:

1. the failure syndrome and resulting low self-esteem
2. family and social matrix
3. maladaptive behavior
4. stress
5. rational thinking
6. lack of awareness of vocational options and realities

All of the aforementioned were addressed during test model presentations. Participants all felt low self-esteem when they began the class; few had experienced success in their lives. All students felt that "choice-thinking" and "option-seeking" behaviors learned in the class enabled a new focus on their life styles. All felt their self-esteem was greatly improved and that they were more able to cope with the stress in their personal lives. Several of our students took the initiative to get professional help from the Mental Health Association on a formal basis because they developed a confidence and rapport with the personnel during class sessions.

Project Tomorrow worked hand-in-hand with personnel from the NNCC Adult Learning Center. In Fall of 1984, classtime accessibility was increased by the extension of classroom open hours. Sound and solid academic instruction was offered through pre-testing with TABE, and competency-based materials available in the Center. Constant availability of trained tutors was an innovative two-week course where they learned how to use the developmental materials in the Center and participated in training in empathy, listening skills, and supportive tutoring techniques. Tutors also participated in workshops on the Metra System and "Learning Strategies" - a program developed at the University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities which teaches new methods of acquiring, storing, and expressing information. Students enrolled in "Growing and Becoming" were taught studying, learning and information processing skills.

Sessions directed by the Mental Health Association taught students rational decision making, time and stress managements, raising self-esteem, and values clarification. The Nevada Employment Security Department and the Job Opportunity in Nevada (JOIN) office incorporated job preparation training and vocational counseling. The "problem-owning" sections of the course

helped provide students with motivation strong enough to help them compete with the variables in their lives which inhibit learning. By active goal-setting, participants were able to pinpoint their own needs and take direct action towards changing their lives. All students who completed the test model have achieved, or are still pursuing the goals they set for themselves.

There were some expectations in the original proposal that were perhaps not realistic, for example, a "rap" group. The test model classes, with time, developed an excellent rapport and openness among students, but the diversity of the adult learning population and the extreme chaos of most of their lives in managing school, jobs, and families, made leisure time for "rap" groups a not very practical use of time and energy. We frequently saw our students socializing in the halls and breaking for coffee together, so it seems the class led to an unstructured support group of "like minds".

We did not structure any particular system of rewards for this test model. The friendly atmosphere of the class, the availability of the counselor, and the warmth of the Adult Learning Center seemed incentive enough for all but the young males described earlier. The individuals who signed up for this class were extremely self-directed and responsible. Although they had postponed learning earlier in their lives, all were eager to avail themselves of educational opportunity at this point in time and were eager for information that would enhance their progress.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

To demonstrate that a program of student development can improve student retention.

With the exception of the three young males who dropped out of the program in the very beginning, all students who participated in the test model either

have completed or continued to work on their educational goals. Student evaluations at the end of the semester all emphasized that their self-concept was enhanced, they felt more equipped and confident to make rational decisions and learned how to better manage the stress in their lives. Because our numbers were so small, we were able to indicate that student retention is improved by this type of program.

Through research of other programs in Adult Education, our indicators are substantiated by other institutions. A recent three-year study on retention at the University of Texas at El Paso found that the counselor relationship was essential to support high-risk students. The attrition rate in all adult education programs is notoriously high. Many adult students do not know how or where to go for help or how to ask. The counselor position not only can give genuine support in crises, but can be a safe link to the supportive social service network. Many students are too fearful to walk into the Mental Health Office, for example, but they have no qualms about talking with someone in a comfortable educational atmosphere. Their study also incorporated supportive tutoring, study classes and self-development classes, such as those used in our test model.

Edgar J. Boone, in his recent book Developing Programs in Adult Education (Engleweed Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985, p. 42), states "The adult educator's concern is to alter or change, through education, the behavioral patterns of learners to the extent that they become better equipped to cope with and adapt to the almost daily changes that occur within their environments." It is clear from the success of our year as a demonstration project that Project Tomorrow began to do this.

Since learning is a developmental process, it only makes sense that the receptive learner will be the person who is well-intergrated socially, emotionally and intellectually. Education can only help people escape from the morass of poverty when it begins to focus on the individual as a WHOLE entity. Coordination of help for the multifaceted needs of the adult learner has been the primary focus of our project. If a student cannot cope with the bare essentials of his life, he certainly cannot learn.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

In our proposal, we planned that post-testing would take place at three times:

a) End of school year -- to determine progress.
Post-test here will again be the TABE.

b) When the student takes and passes the GED. This in itself will serve as an indication of the program's success.

c) When the student leaves the program for other reasons, every effort will be made to learn his or her motivation.

Instructors and tutors were responsible for keeping meticulous records of each student's progress, attendance and personal development and monitored the program in progress through the counseling component of the program. Classwork progress was recorded by the teacher in charge.

Because the construction of the test model for credit required 60 hours of class "seat" time, few students enrolled in the Adult Learning Center were able to participate. The Adult High School Diploma Program personnel were supportive of the class structure which enabled their students to earn one-half credit. The TABE test was given initially to all students as they entered

the Adult Learning Center. On-going competency and skills testing is an integral part of the program, so participants' growth was constantly monitored. Students who participated in the test model were given the COPES/CAPS/COPS series of tests. Personal development was measured by students own evaluation of their progress, counselor evaluation, and peer evaluation. The videotaped interviews were an important part of both self and peer evaluation, and students felt they and their classmates demonstrated great improvement during the semester. Every student who took the class felt the course helped him and said they would recommend it to others. All students perceived growth in each other, which was extremely reinforcing in its own way.

Students who left the program were tracked; their reasons for dropping out were mentioned earlier. Of the nine students who completed the course, one obtained her GED in the spring. The other 90% are all currently pursuing their educational goals. While the numbers may appear small, it must be remembered that we initially enrolled approximately 30% of the students enrolled in the Adult Learning Center in January 1985. Workshops were publicized and offered on a drop-in, open-entry basis for no charge (and no credit since there was no way to monitor progress on an unstructured basis). No students chose to participate in the classes on this casual basis.

OUTCOMES

NNCC chose not to apply for funding for a second year for this project because we believe we have learned from it what there was to be learned. Sixty hours of structured seat time for one-half elective credit seems an inordinate amount of time for the already overstressed adult learner. Retention literature from around the country demonstrates that there are many variables that help a student remain in school, including counseling,

courses which help raise the learner's self-esteem, support services, and training in study skills.

Because all our students who completed the test model were enthusiastic about it and its effect on their lives, NNCC plans to continue this course as part of the regular program offering in Elko. It will be open to college and high school diploma/GED program participants for elective credit. All agencies who participated in the test model were enthusiastic about its continuation and are eager to help with it in the future. Because of the working of the test model, NNCC was able to serve as a link between the helping agencies and the student in need of help.

In conclusion, Project Tomorrow demonstrated a viable need for a program which addresses the individual needs of an often overlooked segment of the learning population. We believe the presence of this demonstration project in our Adult Learning Center added an element of warmth and caring to the program, thus humanizing the institution. The introduction of a curriculum for "personal literacy" and functional competence offered hand-in-hand with basic skills training gave students the tools to implement their new learning. This project helped adult learners learn how to learn, and showed them a new awareness and self-initiative. This project has become an important thread in the tapestry of excellence for Adult Learning in Northeastern Nevada because it took into account the NEEDS of each individual as a striving, respectable human being.

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